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SUBJECT: IRELAND'S PROGRESS ON TRAVEL DOCUMENT SECURITY

REF: STATE 203819

1. (U) Summary. Cons Chief met with Irish Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Ray Bassett to deliver a

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white paper on the 2004 VWP Review as per reftel and engaged in a lengthy discussion on Irish plans to upgrade the state of travel document security. With Ireland the 14th ranked country in terms of non-immigrant admissions to the U.S., efforts to tighten up passport security here have a direct impact on U.S. national security. End Summary.

2. (U) On November 8, Cons Chief met with Irish Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Ray Bassett. The main

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purpose of the meeting was to deliver a white paper detailing the release of the 2004 Visa Waiver Program Country Reviews by DHS as pertaining to Ireland. The report was well received and gave Cons Chief and A/S Bassett the opportunity to discuss current plans by the GOI to upgrade the integrity of its travel documents and to better regulate their use. Given the large numbers of visitors to the United States entering on Irish passports, this is welcome news.

3. (U) According to DHS records, there were 428,209 non-immigrant admissions of Irish citizens into the United States in FY-2004, making Ireland the 14th ranked country in terms of admissions to the U.S. Of this figure, approximately 320,000 entered under terms of the Visa Waiver Program. In addition, between 1991 and 2004, a total of 34,504 Irish-born people became U.S. citizens through naturalization. As Ireland's economy has boomed in recent years and the level of immigration has increased dramatically, Irish citizenry is no longer restricted to those whose roots are deep in the Emerald Isle. It is not unusual to see Irish citizens born in Africa, Asia, and the Near East. Also, approximately 30,000 Irish passports are issued each year to residents of Northern Ireland (this number is expected to grow to around 50,000 per year). Because of all of this, it is clearly in the U.S. national interest that the Irish passport scheme is a secure one.

4. (U) A/S Bassett told Cons Chief that the very day of our meeting the GOI was preparing to announce the launch of the new biometric Irish passport. In essence, this will merely require the insertion of the biometric chip into the current passport, which was introduced last year with the biometric requirements in mind. The same firm, SDU of the Netherlands, will be developing the chip. A/S Bassett estimates that full implementation could begin in as little as nine months, meaning that Ireland would be well within the October 2006 deadline.

5. (SBU) A major loophole in Irish law has been that there are no real penalties on the use of fraudulent documents to get into Ireland. Anecdotally, we have heard that this fact makes Ireland particularly attractive to fraudulent asylum seekers, as the repercussions for travel here on bogus documentation are far less severe than in other countries. This legal loophole provided a significant amount of comfort to the "Colombia Three," the IRA members accused of assisting the FARC and who escaped Colombian custody, fleeing to Ireland on allegedly false documents. This case was a sort of wake-up call to this notable gap in Irish legislation. As a result, the GOI is currently drafting legislation that would provide criminal penalties for the use of false documentation and are looking to British models for insight. A/S Bassett said that he hopes this legislation could be introduced by this coming spring.

6. (SBU) A/S Bassett said that Ireland is now beginning to take seriously the issue of lost and stolen passports and is developing a mechanism whereby that information would be passed to the Embassy as it becomes available. In addition, they are hoping to be able to begin providing lost and stolen passport information to their visa officers in the field, something that is not currently done.

7. (U) Comment. Ireland appears to be making a serious effort to bring its consular operations in line with European and worldwide norms. Its history, until recently,

as a net exporter of immigrants, caused it to focus on these issues far later than many other countries, but it has been able to benefit from their experience in this area to try to adopt the most effective new technologies, especially as regarding its new passport. End Comment.

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